

A. Dear Matt:
From my experience coaching couples in their relationships, I have found many to have common problem areas that require special attention. **These areas typically center around 2 factors: Communication and Respect.**

Communication plays a huge part in the success of a relationship. It sounds easy to carry out but so many of us lack the skills necessary to truly communicate our needs, desires and feelings to our spouse. Often, we are afraid to speak our mind, out of fear that our partner will become angry or defensive. So, many people will not say anything at all which ultimately causes misunderstandings and lack of intimacy.

Respect is another important factor in the longevity of a relationship. In the beginning stages, people usually display a high regard for their “better half”. However, in time, this regard slowly fades and is replaced with frustration or lack of respect for their partner because the relationship is not the same as it was in the beginning. Most people in long-term relationships relax their manners and fail to display the polite gestures they used to employ in the courting stages of their relationship.

Most people in the courtship phase pay attention to their appearance and their clothes wanting to look special for their significant other. They tend to watch what they say and how they say it. They refrain from putting down their partner’s opinions and instead, find interest in what is important to them. They don’t interrupt; rather they listen intently to the other person giving them their full attention.

A typical relationship 10 years later tends to look a lot different. People become so comfortable with one another they believe it really doesn’t matter what they look like because “they’re married”.

Q. Dear Renee,
I’ve been married for ten years but am worried that we may be stuck in a rut. It seems that all we do together is argue. We are very involved with our jobs and both feel exhausted when we come home.
—Matt

Look again. It is important to watch one’s appearance not only for your partner but also for yourself. If you let yourself go physically, you won’t feel as good about yourself mentally. Of course, it is equally important to be able to have an open relationship in which you feel comfortable enough being yourself. I’m not saying that you should always look your best. The difference is in being comfortable and being lazy. Wearing a discolored t-shirt and holey shorts may be comfortable to you but quite an eye sore to the receiver. You can be just as comfortable in similar clothes that put you in a more positive light.

People in long-term relationships tend to forget the importance in how they speak to their partner. The polite behavior tends to give way to demands and lack of appreciation. Even the tone of their voice often changes from using a nice pleasant tone in the courtship stage to loud or spiteful language. They may become annoyed with the other’s opinions when in the beginning they respected it. There is no reason why respecting each other’s opinions has to subside in a long-term relationship. It is okay to disagree and it is healthy to have different views than your partner.

A lack of listening etiquette tends to take place in later stages of a relationship. What used to be interesting conversation with one another becomes routine dialogue often with the receiver half listening. For some reason, many couples stray away from deep conversation, which can lead to disinterest and boredom. It is important to keep your communication etiquette alive

throughout your relationship because it is the foundation in which you build upon.

I have compiled a list of factors that I believe are important aspects of a healthy marriage developed through my experience working with couples with common complaints.

Top 10 Ways to Have a Happy Marriage:

1) Communicate your needs and desires to your partner. Learn the communication skills needed to voice your feelings in an assertive manner.

2) Schedule quality time together on a regular basis. I often give my clients “homework assignments” in scheduling weekly dates with each other. This is often overlooked as unimportant in a marriage when it is most meaningful at the latter stages of a relationship. Regular dates keeps the relationship exciting and gives each partner something to look forward to during the week.

3) Share household responsibilities. While it may never truly be an equal split, it is important to create a balance among partners. Don’t follow gender stereotypes when assigning chores. Rather, decide responsibilities based on skill, knowledge and interest.

4) Be responsible for your own family/relatives. Historically, women were the ones responsible for buying gifts/cards for relative’s birthdays, holidays, etc. Leave it alone if one of you truly enjoys this responsibility. However, many women complain about the additional demands of buying for their husband’s family in addition to their

own. It doesn't matter if one works outside or inside the home. Keep your family duties separate from one another.

5) Share the same core values. Relationships are difficult to maintain if you lack the same core values. I'm talking about sharing the same beliefs on marriage, drugs, children, etc.

6) Have common goals and separate interests. It is important to share common goals with your spouse. Whether it is working towards going on a special vacation or a certain lifestyle, it makes it more exciting when the two of you share the same vision. However, it makes it just as exciting when each of you has separate interests. This gives each of you something to talk about with each other and gives you the space to be an individual.

7) Take the time to go on a vacation at least once a year—separate from the children. It is important to spend time alone with your partner without worrying about the children. After all, it is difficult to be romantic when your little one is competing for your attention.

8) Support each other's careers and/or goals. Neither partner's career is inferior to the others. It isn't based on which person brings in more money. Respect each other's work and goals.

9) Remember the "little things". Don't forget the thoughtful gestures that can really mean a lot to the receiver. Getting your partner's car washed and waxed or filling his tank up

with gas is a small favor that breeds appreciation and kindness within a relationship.

10) Fight fair. Yes, it is normal and healthy to disagree. If people agreed on everything, life would be quite boring. Respect each other's opinions. It's okay to have different views.

Maintaining a marriage is like maintaining your car. You have to put gas in it on a consistent basis and give it regular tune-ups for it to run properly. If you fail to do these things regularly, your car begins to break down. The same holds true for your relationship. You must communicate and respect each other on a regular basis for it to be healthy. The consistent effort it takes to maintain your marriage provides you with a strong and dependable relationship that will bring you miles of happiness and longevity.

Renee Kennedy-Edwards, MS has combined her expertise as a Clinical Psychotherapist and Business Consultant/Trainer into an Executive and Personal Coach assisting others in reaching their potential and effectively moving through transitions. Renee owns Coaching-4-Success, a business in which she coaches individuals, couples and businesses on issues such as, burn-out, communication, motivation, and empowerment. She can be reached at 272-2888 or rkennedyedwards@netscape.net. Renee currently resides in the Naples area with her husband, Robert and daughter, Brittany.

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The Interactive Metronome program is provided to families in Southwest Florida by Therapeutic Integration Services with offices centrally located in Bonita Springs. Sessions are available to individuals or small groups at the clinic, or by special arrangement, in the home, school or other appropriate setting. For further information contact:

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